



**SENIOR RECITAL SERIES | SPRING 2025**

Sunday, March 30th, 7pm

Taplin Auditorium

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# Theo Wells-Spackman '25

## Baritone

### Senior Voice Recital

Featuring:

Ronald Cappon, Piano

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The Department of Music at Princeton University provides its undergraduates—whether they major or minor in Music—the opportunity to learn from a world-renowned faculty of scholars and composers. Performance opportunities include student-led and departmental ensembles like symphony orchestras, multi-genre choruses, jazz, contemporary music, African music, steel band, laptop orchestra, and much more, and students have access to private instrumental and voice lessons from eminent performing artists. The graduate program offers two distinct and prestigious Ph.D. programs in composition or musicology; graduate students receive fully-funded, immersive experiences conducting research, advancing their craft, and collaborating with faculty within Princeton University's inspiring, interdisciplinary campus.

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## PROGRAM

**W.A.  
MOZART**

*From Cosí Fan Tutte:*  
“Donne mie la fate”

**ROBERT  
SCHUMANN**

*Liederkreis Op. 24*  
Poems by Heinrich Heine

- 1) Morgens steh ich auf und frage
- 2) Es treibt mich hin
- 3) Ich wandelte unter den Bäumen
- 4) Lieb' Liebchen
- 5) Schöne Wiege meiner Leiden
- 6) Warte, warte wilder Schiffmann
- 7) Berg und Burgen schaun herunter
- 8) Anfangs wollt' ich auf verzagen
- 9) Mit Myrten und Rosen

## INTERMISSION

*The use of photographic, video, or audio equipment is strictly prohibited. Please turn off or mute electronic devices for the duration of the performance.*

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PROGRAM, cont.

**SETTINGS:  
POEMS BY  
EMILY  
DICKINSON**

Daniel Pinkham

“A Little Boat Adrift”

“Some, Too Fragile for Winter Winds”

David Leisner

“Savior! I’ve No One Else to Tell”

“Ample make this Bed”

Arthur Farwell

“I’m Nobody! Who Are You?”

“Presentiment”

“Papa Above!”

Robert Baksa

“There’s a certain slant of light”

“What inn is this”

**COLE  
PORTER**

From *Kiss Me, Kate*:

“I’ve come to wive it wealthily in Padua”

“Where is the life that late I led”

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## PROGRAM NOTES

### **"Donne mie, la fate a tanti," Cosí Fan Tutte, W.A. Mozart**

Cosí Fan Tutte literally translates to "That's what all women do." The opera begins with a wager between friends about the faithfulness of their fiancée's when the men pretend to be called away to war. The plot is a tangle of disguises, revelations, and desire. "Donne mie," Guglielmo's aria in the second act, is essentially a knowing nod from Guglielmo to Ferrando after the latter expresses outrage at his love interest's apparent fickleness. "If your lovers complain," Guglielmo says to women en masse, "they have good reason indeed."

### **Liederkreis Op. 24, Robert Schumann, poems by Heinrich Heine.**

*Liederkreis* literally translates to "song-cycle". This one was composed in 1840, referred to as Schumann's *Liederjahr*, or "year of song," when he was at his most prolific and focused. 1840 was also the year he married pianist Clara Wieck, the love of his life, which seems to have spurred the rush of creative productivity. The cycle's lyrics are a set of poems by poet and essayist Heinrich Heine, a contemporary of Schumann whose poems were also set by Clara at various points.

This cycle is a series of scenes depicting a heartbroken man who has lost his beloved. They are nonlinear, and at times impressionistic. The overwhelming impulse overall is a desire to locate meaning in his experiences of pain. Each day he waits for her, and when she does not come, each night passes in a broken dream-state (1). The urgency of his hope makes him hate the passing of time (2). He hears words of love in birdsong while wandering in the woods, and resents the memories they force upon him (3). His sleeplessness is punctuated by a pounding heartbeat, prompting a reckoning with a perceived approaching death (4). He painfully departs the town in which he met his beloved, wishing they had never crossed paths (5). In his deep need to leave his pain behind, he leaves Europe entirely, comparing his former love to Eve and Eris, the Greek goddess of strife (6). Gazing into the Rhine from a sailboat, he ponders the darkness beneath the beautiful reflections on its surface (7). "Borne it I have," he says, "but do not ask me how" (8). Finally, in preparing to "bury" his book of songs, he acknowledges that his love for this woman is not so easily put to rest. He hopes, though, that the songbook finds its way to her in time, breaking its *Zauberbann* (9).

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## **Emily Dickinson Settings (Daniel Pinkham, David Leisner, Arthur Farwell, and Robert Baksa)**

These are four very distinct American approaches to Dickinson's text, which span most of the 20th century. Farwell, the earliest of these composers, has clearly internalized a kind of staccato feel in the text with these extremely short settings. The phrases are given time to breathe, with Dickinson's famous em-dash often discernable in these pauses. Farwell is invested in the humor in the text, as well as its potential heaviness. The animal images in "I'm Nobody" and "Papa above" trigger moments of laughter—the piano's framing of "mouse," and "rat" as well as its imitation of Dickinson's frog brings the humor of the text to the surface. "Presentiment" stands out somewhat in this group in both form and content. Every hair is standing on end, and while there's a similar sense of sonic economy here, the humor has faded. Farwell's setting almost resembles recitativo in its first few measures. The effect is tense and text-y, resting in a liminal zone between speech and song.

Baksa and Pinkham, whose settings are more complex, both harmonically and structurally, are working somewhat later. These poems (and their settings) occupy a darker register in Dickinson's world, thinking about death, weariness, and the speaker's relationship with the divine. "There's a certain slant of light, / Winter Afternoons— / that oppresses, like the Heft / of Cathedral Tunes," begins one poem. It's a small, sensory truth that provokes a very serious question—a familiar move for Dickinson. "Baksa and Pinkham have set worry-poems here, reflected in the darkly dissonant chords in the first half of "A little boat adrift" as well as the unsettling, driving, ever-present opening motive of "What inn is this?"

Leisner's 1986 works are a return to a warmer, more tonal sound that still carries the urgency (this setting is marked "con paura") of the text. "Ample make this bed" in particular is almost like a folk song in its texture – one can imagine the strumming quality of the piano being played on a guitar. Even in their concern, these songs carry a strand of hope in their harmony.

One complication in these settings is that these composers were working with versions of Dickinson's text that are not necessarily entirely original. Baksa's "There's a certain slant," for example, carries significant changes to both diction and syntax from the version recognized in current Dickinson scholarship. "Winter

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[Notes cont.]

Afternoons” becomes “On Winter Afternoons,” and “Heft” becomes “Weight,” and “Any” becomes “Anything.” In any poem, but especially those as tight and precise as Dickinson’s work, alterations of this kind have huge implications for the sonic and semantic effect of the text. These changes, however, appear not to have been made by the composer, but by the self-appointed editor of Dickinson’s first published collections of poems, Mabel Loomis Todd. She’s a complicated figure—her dual legacy consists of a) potentially damaging ‘clarifications’ to the published poems which were not rectified until the circulation of Dickinson’s original manuscripts and b) a much-discussed affair with Dickinson’s brother Austin, who in turn was engaged in a dubious marriage with the love of the poet’s life, Susan Gilbert. Composers like Baksa have inherited not just Dickinson’s poems, but the tangled social life of the poet herself.

### ***Kiss Me, Kate, Cole Porter***

Kiss Me, Kate came to Broadway for the first time in 1948, with Cole Porter winning the Tony for best original score at the season’s end. In the layered story of a musical version of Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew*, director Fred Graham also stars as Petruchio. These two songs come from inside this nested play-within-a-play, which in itself is clearly a reference to that Shakespeare’s own use of that trope. In “I’ve come to wive it wealthily in Padua,” the brash Petruchio quotes Shakespeare’s text exactly while laying out his plans to marry Kate (initially for money). In “Where is the life that late I led,” as he begins the battle of wills with his new wife, Petruchio begins to wonder if he wasn’t better off before.

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### **A note:**

I’d like to thank my teacher, Ron Cappon, for his wisdom, patience, and dedication during my time here. Love and thanks as well to my parents, Marion and John, for their support, advice, and willingness to drive a long way. To my friends — thanks for listening, today and in general. I’d also like to thank others in Princeton’s music department—in particular Gabriel Crouch, David Kellett, and Dr. Ruth Ochs—for their support and guidance in other projects during my time here.

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## ABOUT

### **Theo Wells-Spackman (Baritone)**

Theo is a senior in the English department from Weybridge, Vermont. He studies with Ronald Cappon, and was previously a student of Beth Thompson in Vermont. He sang Aeneas in Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* and Papageno in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* with the Princeton Music Department, and is a member of the University's Opera Scenes program. He also sings with the Glee Club, and the Princeton Katzenjammers.

### **Ronald Cappon (Instructor and Piano)**

Ronald Cappon is a Lecturer in Voice at Princeton University since 2000, having also been on the voice faculty at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts and Manhattanville College, and currently at the Manhattan School of Music Precollege. He also has an extensive background in piano and is the collaborative pianist for this recital. As a collaborative pianist, Mr. Cappon has performed in such venues as New York's Weill Recital Hall, Merkin Concert Hall, the 92nd Street Y and Carnegie Hall as well as in concerts in Barbados and Venezuela. In addition to chamber music performances at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, DC and the Interharmony Festival in Italy, he performed in multiple concerts at Vermont's Manchester Music Festival as accompanist, chamber musician and concerto soloist. Mr. Cappon also held the position of Principal Keyboard with the Civic Orchestra of Chicago and was pianist of the Civic Orchestra Piano Quartet, performing in Chicago's Orchestra Hall. Mr. Cappon received the Master of Music Degree in Collaborative Piano from the Manhattan School of Music under the tutelage and guidance of Martin Katz. He is delighted to be performing with Mr. Wells-Spackman this evening.

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